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archaeology, the beginnings have their quaint aspects, founded as they are in the economic response to those great underlying human frailties of vanity, vice, and superstition; for the earliest prints were cloth stamped to imitate brocades, playing cards, and talismans. Is one interested in the development of social custom, the life of man of every degree is set forth with quizzical humor from the time of the Master of the Housebook, sometime in the third quarter of the fifteenth century, to the inimitable pages of the Charivari, that great storehouse of early nineteenth-century life and manners. Would one confine oneself to the study of prints as such, and be of a reading turn of mind, let him study the history of technique and find out the secret of Elzheimer's white etching ground—as elusive a secret as what song the sirens sung. Should, however, one prefer simply to play detective with one's eye, let him separate the real Rembrandts from the Rembrandts of the catalogues; it is a pleasant solitaire, and like choosing the ten best books for a desert isle one gets a different answer each time one tries. From one point of view the most charming thing about the historical study of prints is the often footless chase it leads one through human records—the keen delight of hunting rather than the sober satisfaction of bringing home the game. Thus the closest approximation to the date of the earliest etching was arrived at through the study of the portraits of a court fool, and the mysterious meaning of some of Dürer's woodcuts solved casually by a tailor's costume book.

One further word about the new department, and I shall have finished. With the exception of the Library the other departments of the Museum have constantly on exhibition a very large portion of the objects under their care. In the print department this cannot be so—as the exhibition galleries at any one time will hold a very small portion of the collection. In order that the collection may serve its purpose, therefore, the departmental study room will be the place to which most persons not merely casually looking at

prints will have to come. It is my intention and very earnest hope that many people shall come to that study room, where it will be my very great pleasure and constant endeavor to serve them in their aesthetic diversion and to aid and cheer them in their researches.

W. M. I., Jr.

## WILLIAM M. CHASE, PAINTER<sup>1</sup>

THE qualifying word in the title of this article is not here used in its generic and merely professional sense, as signifying a producer of pictures, but in that more special and emphatic signification that distinguishes the kind and quality of an artistic talent. Of all our artists Mr. Chase is the most distinctively and emphatically a *painter*, marked for such both by his powers and by his limitations. He cares little for abstract form, less for composition, and hardly at all for thought or story; but the iridescence of a fish's back or the creamy softness of a woman's shoulder, the tender blue of a morning sky or the vivid crimson of a silken scarf—yes, or the red glow of a copper kettle or the variegated patches of clothes hung out to dry—these things he seizes upon and delights in, and renders with wonderful deftness and precision. He is, as it were, a wonderful human camera—a seeing machine—walking up and down in the world, and in the humblest things as in the finest discovering and fixing for us beauties we had else not thought of. Place him before a palace or a market stall, in Haarlem, Holland, or in Harlem, New York, and he will show us that light is everywhere, and that nature is always infinitely interesting. His art is objective and external, but all that he sees he can render, and he sees everything that has positive and independent existence. He is a technician of the breed of Hals and Velasquez; a *painter*, in a word. We have more imaginative artists, better draughtsmen, men of a subtler and more personal talent, but we have

<sup>1</sup> Extracts from an article printed in Harper's Magazine for March, 1889, copyrighted, 1889, by Harper and Brothers, and reprinted by the courtesy of the publishers and the author.

no such painter as Mr. Chase, and the world has today few better.

William M. Chase was born in Franklin County, Indiana, in the year 1849. In his twentieth year he decided to follow the career of art, and entered the studio of a local portrait-painter named Hayes. In 1869 he came to New York, and worked for two years at the schools of the National Academy, and in the studio of J. O. Eaton. His parents had in the meantime gone to live at St. Louis, and there in 1871 went Chase, his education finished, to begin the practise of his profession. His work at that time, mostly still-life, with an occasional portrait, he describes as conscientious but painfully hard and minute.

This stage of his career was not a long one. He met in St. Louis a Mr. John Mulvany, then recently returned from Munich, whose sketches were to him a revelation of the possibilities of direct and vigorous painting. Under his influence he awoke to a sense of his own shortcomings, and determined to go to Munich himself and recommence his studies. He got from friends enough commissions to support him for some time, went to Munich, and laying aside his pretensions to full-fledged artishood, entered the Academy in 1872, and worked his way up from the antique class. In Munich he remained six years.

It is strange to think of this nervous, energetic American in smoky, beery, bituminous Munich; of this brilliant, versatile, cosmopolitan painter as a pupil of Piloty. The art of Mr. Chase is today far more Parisian than Bavarian, and it would be a clever analyst that should, from sight of his present work only, divine the schooling he has had. Nevertheless, the effect upon a highly organized and receptive nature of six years of training during that formative period between the ages of twenty and thirty must needs have been profound and lasting; and radical as seems at first sight the difference between Mr. Chase's earlier work and his later, it is still possible to see how the transformation may have taken place, and to trace in the work of today subtle signs of its origin in that of yesterday.

What we have to consider is not the influence upon him of the academic theory and practice, which was as small as possible, but that of the artistic atmosphere and life of the place itself, which was very great—an influence partly good and partly bad. All Munich men are enthusiastic lovers of art and of the great old masters. There is no Salon in Munich, and little life; the painters there are not busy discussing the last sensational success or the newest *tableau à médaille*; neither are they occupied with politics, or the stage, or society, or the picture market: when they wish to see pictures they go to the galleries and study Rubens or Hals or Rembrandt; they work, while daylight lasts, before their easels, and they meet at night in some old Bavarian tavern to talk of their art over pipes and beer. They see and hear of and care for nothing but their own art, their own trade; and so they become able and enthusiastic workmen, and acquire a love of painting for painting's sake that lasts them their lifetime. The galleries of Munich contain few first-class works by the great Italians, and the student's attention is naturally fixed upon the supreme technicians of Holland and Flanders, whose life his own resembles, and whose works are constantly before him. His love of art may be narrow, but it is sure to be pure and intense. The danger is that the love of painting may degenerate into the love of paint, that execution may usurp the place of more serious qualities. The Munich-trained artist is sure to handle his brush freely and well, but he is a little apt to neglect form and solidity, and to think more of brilliancy of representation than of the essential nature of the thing represented. Another fault he has also—blackness. Their exclusive contemplation of the old masters and their isolation from the current of modern painting have led the artists of Munich to ignore the advent of light in the pictures of today; but why they should also ignore the treasures of clearness and luminosity to be found in the best works of the Dutch school, and never absent even from the sombre canvases

of Rembrandt, it is more difficult to understand. Such, however, is the fact, and an abuse of bitumen and a notion that tone is dependent upon blackness is a constant mark of your true *Münchener*.

These, then, are the characteristics of the young Munich to which Mr. Chase belonged, and of which he was no inconsiderable part: contempt of story, subject, and even of composition; true love of painting for its own sake; brilliancy and facility of handling, with some neglect of form and substance; and blackness of tone. They mark Mr. Chase's work of that time as strongly as they do that of his contemporaries. His distinction is that while they have, for the most part, retained the evil with the good, and remain today, wherever they may be, Munich painters, he has retained the good and dropped the evil.

Long before he left Munich he had begun the practice of making tours to other cities for the purpose of copying in the museums, and the last year of his stay abroad he spent in Venice with Duveneck; since then he has copied Velasquez in Madrid and the Dutch masters in Holland, and has seen Salon after Salon in Paris; at home he has been brought into contact with artists brought up in the schools of Paris, and has no doubt learned something from them, as they have learned much from him. His mind and his style have broadened with his broadened opportunities, and the difference between his work of today and that of an earlier period is almost as the difference between day and night. And yet it was interesting, at the special exhibition of his work held at Moore's Gallery a year or more ago, to see that, although the tone had changed, the handling was still the same. Light and color were the very essence of the new work; they hardly existed in the old; yet all that was good in the work of his old Munich days remained. Here were the old delight in the technique of painting and the old directness and freedom of manner; here were even the old tricks of the brush—the very touch was the same. Only, where the older pictures were dark the newer were light. The old love of

blackness was gone, and in its place was an intense love of light and color and the open air, and with it there was a vastly increased power of subtle and unconventional composition. Mr. Chase has always been essentially a *painter*: he is now a much better painter than ever before, and a painter of pictures—not merely of studies.

The first characteristic of his work that would strike a stranger to it is probably its versatility and wide range of subject. Whatever the bodily eye can see, Mr. Chase can paint, but with the eye of the imagination he does not see. By nature and instinct he leaves to others the attempt to give form and substance to the figments of the brain. He is content to rest upon the solid earth, and finds in the manifold aspects of external nature matter that shall occupy a lifetime in its setting forth. "Within this limit is relief enough," and with an eye trained to see and a hand trained to render the shifting many-sidedness of things, one has work enough cut out for one man.

The second notable characteristic of this work is the temper of technical experiment in which it is executed. Its subjects are not more varied than are its means of expression. Oil, water-color, gouache, pastel, are all in turn employed, and each with the same unerring sureness put to its best use. A canvas ten feet square or a panel five inches, a surface as rough as coffee sacking or as smooth as ivory—each is made to show that something can be done with it that can be done with nothing else.

These are the two great characteristics of your true painter wherever you find him: an impartial love for nature as it is, and an almost equal love for the tools of his art. He does not care to idealize or to torture himself in the search for the abstractly beautiful; the naturally beautiful is good enough for him, and he is contented to set himself delightful and not insoluble problems of rendition, and draws infinite pleasure from their resolution. No man has such delight in his work as he. As he does not attempt the impossible, he is spared the agony of inevitable failure. His work is the

healthy exercise of highly organized and highly trained faculties, and is as natural as the free play of a child, and as pleasurable as the exercise of an athlete.

And as the labor of love gives joy to the worker, so it has the greater chance of bringing joy to the beholder. We have had enough and to spare of the false criticism that blames an artist for not being something he is not; we can hardly have enough of the true criticism that heartily enjoys what he is. In the house of art there are many mansions, and room enough for many various talents. Each in its way can give us pleasure, and there is a very high and a very true enjoyment to be gotten from art of this objective sort—an enjoyment differing in kind, but perhaps not in degree, from that afforded by more imaginative art. The executive talent, the talent of the technician, is perhaps in its highest forms as rare as any other. The mission of the technician—of the painter *par excellence*—is the high one of showing us the beauty of the commonest and humblest objects. He shows us that, rightly considered, a battered tin pan is a thing of beauty and worthy of attention in its degree, and that there is something worth noting in a rotting post by the water-side or a "white sheet bleaching on the hedge." But of all kinds of art this is the hardest to describe or to reproduce. The meaning of an allegory or the just treatment of a story the critic can expound. Before the beauty of line or the sublimity of light and shade he is helpless; but the engraver can step in to his aid, and you may measurably understand the art of form from reproduction alone. But an art that is neither literary nor linear puzzles both critic and engraver, and neither can much help you to appreciate the simple rightness and soundness of a bit of painting. Go to the next exhibition where you can find a good piece of Mr. Chase's work, and you will understand more of it after five minutes' inspection than you would from pages of writing or of illustration.

I have spoken of the painter as a wandering eye, and of his mission of finding out beauty in common objects and in un-

expected places. It has so happened that for two years past Mr. Chase has foregone his trips abroad, and has passed his summers in Brooklyn. And being there, he has explored Brooklyn for paintable subjects, as he had explored Amsterdam and Venice, and with somewhat astonishing results. From these explorations he has brought back a series of small pictures of parks and docks which are veritable little jewels. It is new proof, if proof were wanted, that it is not subjects that are lacking in this country, but eyes to see them with. Let no artist again complain of lack of material when such things as these are to be seen at his very door, and let the public cease complaining of the un-American quality of American art at least until they have snatched up every one of these marvelous little masterpieces. They are far and away the best things Mr. Chase has yet done, and are altogether charming. Crisp, fresh, gay, filled with light and air and color and the glitter of water and dancing of boats, or the brightness of green grass in sunshine and the blue depths of shade upon gravel-walks, brilliant with flowers and the dainty costumes of women and children, they are perfection in their way, and could not be improved upon.

These pictures were a surprise, but it would seem that there is no end to the possible surprises Mr. Chase carries in his sack, and he has lately drawn forth another. Within a short time some of us have seen a few lovely pastels of the nude female figure from his hand. The delicate feeling for color and for values, the masterly handling of the material, the charm of texture in skin or stuffs—these things we were prepared for; but we were not quite prepared for the fine and delicate drawing, the grace of undulating contour, the solid constructive merit which seemed to us a new element in his work.

Such is a brief account of the work of William M. Chase, a true artist and a born painter, whose talent, within certain defined but receding limits, is of the highest quality, and of whose merits a heartier recognition were desirable.

KENYON COX.